

Channel 32 ready to go Monday

The byword in TV and radio this weekend is more.

More over-the-air TV is coming. That Appleton station is on the brink of starting up.

The word from WXGZ-TV, Channel 32, is, "We're set to go on Monday morning."

WXGZ will be the sixth big-power station in the Green Bay market.

Beginning at 6 a.m. Monday, it plans to operate right away at just over 1 million watts.

Though its headquarters is in Appleton, its tower is near those of all the rest of the Green Bay stations on Scray's Hill.

Channel 32 says it will be able to send a signal 80 miles, though its prime signal will fall in a circle roughly including Hortonville, New Holstein, Algoma and Krakow.

Green Bay is within that circle, so you shouldn't have any problems receiving it. (Don't hold me to that, though; TV signals can have quirks.)

For cable subscribers, Channel 32 won't be on for a while — though both local systems are required to carry it.

Suburban Total TV says it should have its equipment ready soon. N.E.W. Media Cablevision of Green Bay and Howard says a



Gerds

Warren Gerds is critic-at-large of the Press-Gazette

manufacturer has yet to ship the gear it needs.

Cable subscribers curious about the new station will have to go back to standard methods tuning in to catch it.

Channel 32 is an independent station. Its lineup includes lots of series from the past, some sports and movies.

In the latter, a familiar face is returning as host of the weeknight package — Dean Javes. He co-hosted Channel 5's "PM Magazine" until last summer.

For Channel 32 to survive, it's got to pull in new advertisers or lure old ones away from the

established commercial channels.

So far, things "have been going quite well," says Sam Hutchison, promotion and program manager.

"Of course, nobody is anxious to spend money on something they can't see, so a lot of people are really waiting for us to get on the air."

■ More channels are scheduled to be activated today on Cablevision.

Two are basic services: CNN Headline News, on Channel 4, and the Financial News Network on Channel 10.

Two are pay services: the Disney Channel on 14, the Playboy Channel on 36.

Until March 11, all subscribers will be able to receive Disney free.

After that, the signal will be scrambled by a new computer, and anyone interested will have to get a new channel selector and pay.

The new selector is also needed for Playboy.

Brent Zhorne, Cablevision general manager, says Playboy has been outpacing Disney by a 2-1 margin in early orders, which are in the hundreds.

There has been little backlash about adding Playboy, he says — one letter and half a dozen phone calls in protest.

■ More radio is coming, though there have been delays.

The new FM radio station in De Pere, WJLW, is well past its original target date.

Jack Le Duc, president, says some construction matters had to be approved by the De Pere City Council. Most are out of the way, and he's looking at August to go on the air.

■ More features from the RKO-Two network have been picked up WDUZ-AM Radio.

Earlier this month, the station began airing sports reports from Don Criqui and John Madden, soap opera and pop music shorts and the one-hour "Live From the Record Plant" (Sundays at 10 p.m.) with Father Guido Sarducci as a regular.

More shows begin this weekend.

The five-hour "Solid Gold Saturday Night" starts today at 6 p.m., and the two-hour "Solid Gold Scrapbook" begins Sunday at 5 p.m.

Although "straight news" is available from RKO-Two, DUZ is continuing with ABC Contemporary News.

Earlier this month, WNFL began airing RKO-One.

A lot of the radio networks offer different styles of packages tailored to varying age brackets of listeners. That's the case with the RKO stuff.



Established rivals don't faze WXGZ

We went to visit the new kid on the TV block the other day. Says he's doing fine. Says there's plenty of room around here for him.

Says he intends to stay. I don't know if any TV viewer objects to his presence. After all, who's going to say they don't want more choices in what they watch?

And the kid says he's been welcomed with open arms, notably around his Appleton home base. This new kid is a bit of an odd sort.

First, there's his name — WXGZ. The choice was deliberately "hard-sounding" to be different and distinctive. Or so the kid says.

And then there's that quirk of tower location.

WXGZ, Channel 32, is licensed to operate in Appleton. Its studio and offices are there. It wants a strong association in the Fox Valley.

Funny thing is, its transmitting tower is 22 miles away on Scray's Hill southeast of De Pere — where all the Green Bay TV stations' towers are located.

Scray's Hill is the optimum tower site in the region because of its height. If any station wants a good, unimpeded signal, that's the place to be.

By the way, Channel 32's nearest neighbor, but 100 yards away on "the tower farm," is Channel 26. They're fellow independent stations — and ardent competitors.

The new kid came in with three network-affiliate stations well-established, Channel 26 making inroads and cable in hand or on the way all over the landscape. Is this kid some kind of glutton for punishment?

"There's plenty of room in the whole market," says Bill Le Monds, WXGZ general manager. "We cover such a wide area. Our signal (1 million watts) goes so far, 80 miles. There's plenty of room for everybody."

"There's some very good competitors out there. There are no slouches. But neither are we, we feel."

From what Channel 32 puts on the air — lots of old shows and movies — you may associate oldness with the station. Quite the opposite is true.

Its headquarters on a yet-unpaved road in an industrial park: new. The electronic gear: new, save for one piece not made anymore. Outside, two satellite reception dishes: new. Its tower and antenna: new. Brand new.

It all cost "millions," Le Monds says, not revealing a specific

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figure.

WXGZ is the eighth station built by Media Central, a managerial firm based in Chattanooga, Tenn. And Media Central has at least eight more in the works.

It does not own Channel 32. "There are 40 investors involved who own the station," Le Monds says. "Media Central manages the station through us. You could call it the Media Central umbrella more or less."

In building so many stations, Media Central has been buying bulk.

"When you're talking in terms of buying eight, 10, 12 transmitters (at hundreds of thousands of dollars each), it makes a lot of sense to buy at that volume," Le Monds says.

He adds, "We can buy programming, equipment, etc. on more of a volume basis than one individual station standing alone. It becomes a lot more economical the way we're doing it."

"For example, if you were to go to four of the seven other (Media Central) markets, you would find practically the same building," Le Monds points down and says, "This desk is in probably every station."

"They're stamping out stations? 'Right,' he laughs.

In programming, Channel 32 has "full say," Le Monds says. Decisions are made by a trio: Le Monds, Channel 32 program manager Sam Hutchison and Media Central's programmer in Chattanooga.

Down the road, Le Monds says, Media Central is looking at having a hand in 20 to 30 stations.

Asked whether he thinks some day there may be a fourth commercial TV network, Le Monds says sure.

Would Channel 32 be interested in affiliation? He smiles and says, "Why do you think we have two satellite dishes out back?"

But we're getting ahead of the game a bit. More imperative is the matter of survival in the near future.

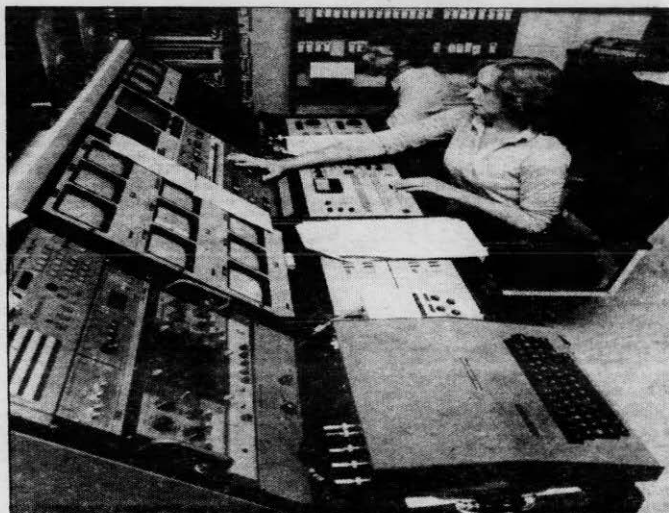
Channel 32 is operating in the red, as any new station does.

Yes, there is a goal date for breaking even, Le Monds says, but he won't divulge it.

"I'll tell you this," he says. "We are beyond our projections as we talk today on both revenue and just general flow of what's happening."



New station: Announcer Dean Javes, left, works on a set in Channel 32's Appleton studios. Photo at the right shows technician Steve Blecha and Rebecca Baum in the control room. The television station is the newest one in the Fox Valley.



Press-Gazette photos by John E. Roemer

He later says the station has 72 advertisers.

Soon Channel 32 will get its first reading of what kind of impact, if any, it's had on the viewing public. Ratings surveys taken in May will be released in a few weeks, with Channel 32 listed for the first time.

"If we get 2's and 3's to start, I'll be very happy," Le Monds says. He's referring to share numbers meaning 2 and 3 percent of total audience.

No great expectations, in other words. With reason.

Le Monds says, "I've seen stations who have been on the air for a year in some markets and still have goose eggs."

He emphasizes, "We've made a commitment, obviously, in the outlay of dollars to build this station. And we've made a commitment to the people who are here. And we're going to do it: We're going to be here."

Signs of encouragement came early. The station got viewer feedback on Day One, March 7.

"It took about, believe it or not, less than 20 minutes," Le Monds says. "We were on the air with our test pattern, and we were getting

calls from Door County, Fond du Lac — areas that just blew me away."

"One thing that I found — I even get goose bumps talking about it — is people were more excited that they could see our test pattern than I think possibly we were. And we were extremely excited."

"You've gone through all of this work, all of this turmoil and you finally have something on the screen which is the end result and we're getting calls from people: 'Hey, we see your test pattern!'"

"No kidding! That's great!"

term.

"Movies tend to be a good catalyst for getting viewers to watch ... And then it's up to us to promote ourselves within those movies."

Le Monds says Channel 32 went with a live-hosted movie offering (with Dean Javes, formerly of Channel 5's "PM Magazine") to

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Affordability makes movies No. 1 at 32

First in the heart of Channel 32 is movies.

The station carries movies weekday mornings, each night at 7 and all through Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

It didn't start out intending to do that.

The station had various other types of programming in mind, but a realization quickly set in: The dollars and cents would be too

hefty for a station just getting off the ground.

Bill Le Monds, general manager, says, "It's a lot cheaper for us to purchase movie packages than it is to go out and pick up 'Charlie's Angels,' 'Happy Days,' whatever the case may be — if they're available."

"That type of programming is extremely expensive, and you've got to commit yourself over a long

Movies big at Channel 32

From Page 3

get some identity in the market.

Le Monds says there are "tons and tons of movie packages out there" for stations to purchase.

"The same with other types of programs.

"With the advent of cable," Le Monds says, "a lot of companies have sprung up all over the place. You wouldn't believe the amount of programming that's out there."

Channel 32 has some program changes in store for fall, but Le Monds is letting none out of the bag — "It would be giving away our game plan" to competing stations.

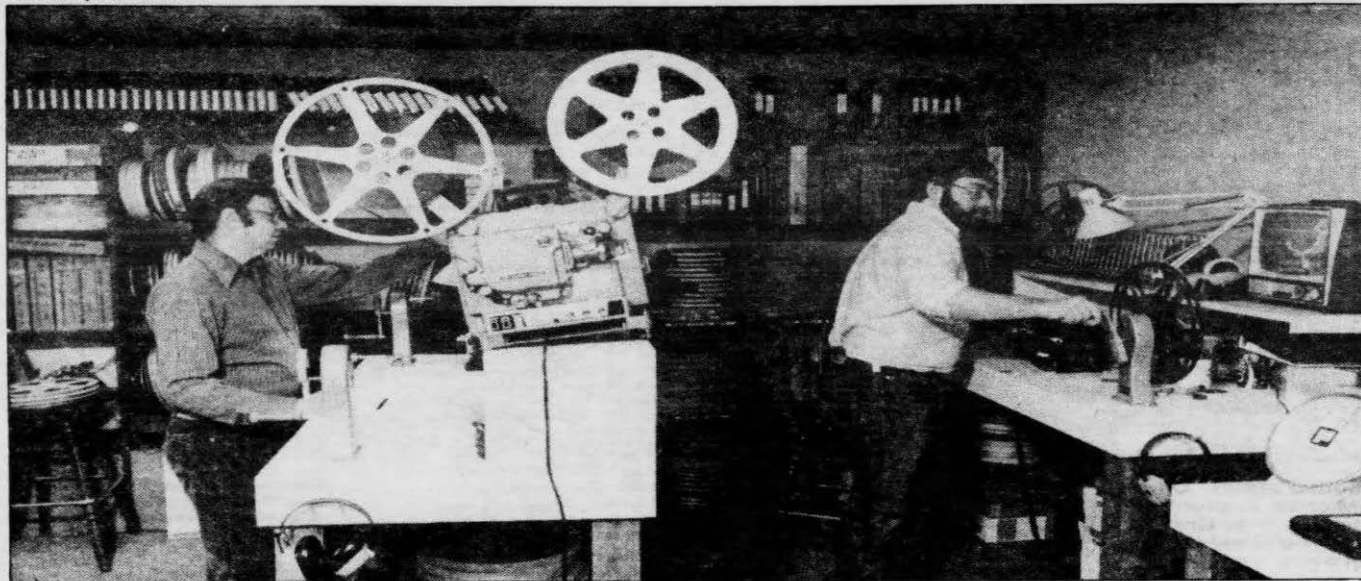
"But you will always find the movies at 7 o'clock Monday through Sunday. That is something we are totally sticking with."

Many of Channel 32's shows are reruns from well in the past — "Leave It to Beaver," "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," "Wild, Wild West."

With first-run programs, Le Monds says, it's "difficult to take a half-hour show that has no awareness, put a lot of money into it and build it."

On the other hand, a show like "Mary Tyler Moore" has an identity from previous runs. "I just have to create a desire to watch it at a specific time on our television station," Le Monds says.

The station plans to add more sports telecasts. In some cases,



Press-Gazette photo

Getting ready: Harold "Hummer" Davich, left, and Randy Moreau preview and splice movies for Channel 32.

bidding battles could break out.

Channel 32 is slated to show the Auburn-Miami college football game live Aug. 27. It has also picked up the Liberty Bowl and Aloha Bowl at the end of the season.

Le Monds says the station is "very definitely" interested Mil-

waukee Brewers and Bucks telecasts — which show on competing Channel 26.

"When it comes to bidding time, I guarantee you this station will be first in line," Le Monds says.

It's unlikely Channel 26 will roll over and play dead in face of

such a challenge.

Channel 32 is looking at possibilities of carrying other games, but not much is definite yet.

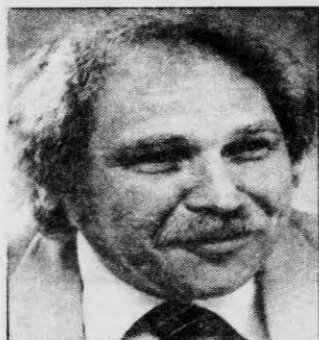
Le Monds says the station has had no problem getting suggestions about what to carry.

"Everybody's a programmer," he chuckles.

Channel 32's receives all sorts of recommendations about what it should carry. The station's philosophy is probably best-expressed by this comment from Le Monds:

"We're trying to entertain, and we're trying to give the people what they're looking for — and what we can afford to do."

Le Monds took long route to G.M. post



Bill Le Monds
Has Packer ties

How does one become the general manager of a new TV station?

For Bill Le Monds of WXYZ, it was a long and winding road.

Along the way, there have been some tie-ins with the Green Bay Packers which spice his story.

For many years, though, Milwaukee television was his stomping ground.

He worked for 23 years at WITI. Le Monds started as a photographer, ended as local sales manager. In between, he did such things as produce the evening newscasts and produce and direct more than 8,000 commercials.

After WITI, he moved to Milwaukee to WCGV-TV as general sales manager, later becoming general manager. "It wasn't a very prosperous situation," he says, so he left.

For a year, he worked for Mc-

Donald/Davis & Associates, which produced "The Bart Starr Show." Le Monds helped syndicate the show regionally.

In addition, "I was in charge of Lofton, Jefferson and Douglass Associates (a business agency to professional athletes) and worked with all those folks," Le Monds says.

"Another part of my job was to be (Chicago Bears Head Coach) Mike Ditka's agent and set up a syndication of programs for him. I worked with his radio and television enterprises in Chicago."

Le Monds was in print advertising for a short time before Channel 32 came up.

"We knew people who know people, and one thing led to another," he says.

At Channel 32, he is in charge of a staff of 27.

Closet, AP news machine, comprise 32's 'newsroom'

Sam Hutchison, Channel 32's promotion/program manager, is leading us on a tour of the station.

We've seen just about everything — the offices, control room, studio and so on.

Hutchison is about to leave a room, and he remembers something.

"Oh yes," he says, "this is our newsroom."

He begins to open a door, and we expect it to open on at least another room.

It's a closet.

Tapping away is an Associated Press wire machine, its sole occupant.

So much for the "newsroom."

We're told later the machine is closeted for security purposes, and that the station will get into newscasts eventually.

But "no way are we going to go with half-hour newscasts," says Bill Le Monds, general manager.

"We'll do three- or five-minute news updates, starting maybe midday and going through prime time, maybe every hour or two," he says.

"We are in the process of auditioning news people, and we're developing a set. It'll be a small news staff."

Briefly . . .

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Bankruptcy court OKs WXGZ-TV sale

A bankruptcy court in Atlanta, Ga., has approved the sale of the assets of WXGZ-TV, Channel 32.

Details about what will happen to the station and its assets will not be known for certain until 10 days after the order is signed and filed and there is no appeal, according to Jeffrey Jaekels, attorney for the buyer.

The probable date for that is Monday Feb. 10, Jaekels said.

There's no joy as TV 32 prepares to sign off



Press-Gazette photo by Ken Wesely

Time expiring: Thomas McMillan, left, a Wisconsin Job Service representative from Neenah, speaks

with WXXZ-TV, Channel 32, employee Ed Myers on a set of the Appleton-based television station.

Workers take pride in accomplishments

By Warren Gerds

Press-Gazette

APPLETON — The end is near, but WXXZ-TV employees are holding their heads high.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of — that we are going out of business — because we did try our hardest," said Ed Myers, 30, 1617 Bruce Lane, assistant chief engineer.

Eight years of trying hard to make it as the fifth commercial station in the Green Bay TV market comes to a close at 11:30 p.m. Friday.

WXXZ is going off the air, possibly to be replaced on channel 32 at a future date by a shopping channel.

Behind-the-scenes folks expressed a sense of accomplishment in having beamed *The Simpsons*, two *Star Trek* clans and Oscar the clown into 470,000



Oscar
May hang up his nose

homes and about 1.2 million people in the region.

"We always managed to put out a quality product," Myers said.

A mix of emotions is rippling through WXXZ's Appleton office. Joy is not among them.

"This week is going as if we were at a funeral home because something is dying before our eyes that we're proud of," said general manager Roy Smith, 63, Atlanta.

About WXXZ-TV

- ☐ **Started:** March 7, 1984
- ☐ **Ending:** Friday
- ☐ **Fox shows premiere:** April 5, 1987
- ☐ **Known for:** Such Fox shows as *The Simpsons*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, and *Married ... with Children*; the syndicated *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; and its own *Wisconsin's Most Wanted* (at least seven apprehended), *Oscar's Place*, *Easter Seals Moviethon* (\$32,000 raised this year)
- ☐ **Reason leaving:** Bankruptcy
- ☐ **Finale:** Half-hour retrospective, 11 p.m. Friday

soul into it," he said.

"This is not just a wayside fruit stand we're dealing with," Smith said. "We're dealing with a living, breathing institution of service, and they have hung in there through all of the problems we've had, the bankruptcy court and so forth."

A feeling of closeness fills the building.

Please see Channel 32/A-2

Channel 32 will return

■ CableVision wants to see its program lineup before committing

By Warren Gerds
Press-Gazette

The return of WXGZ, Channel 32, in June will cause a ripple effect.

Along with viewers, cable systems and the Milwaukee Brewers have an eye on the station.

WXGZ on Tuesday got the go-ahead from the Federal Communications Commission to put construction into motion that will return the station to the air.

The station was forced from the air in February 1992 because its previous owner went bankrupt.

The station has a new owner, Ace Inc., a West Virginia-based company principally owned by Carl Martin.

The target to resume broadcasting is Friday, June 3, according to Bob Cox, general manager.

"We're going to be carrying syndicated shows, some HSN (Home Shopping Network), some infomercials and a lot of sports," said Cox said.

Laurel Prieb, Brewers director of communications, has expressed dismay the club hasn't been able to find a Green Bay station to broadcast as many games as the Brewers would like. The club is eager for the station to return.

"He (Prieb) calls me at home at 10 o'clock at night wanting to know," Cox said.

WXGZ would operate at 1,050,000 watts, said Lyle Evans, who helped the station through the FCC approval phase. Evans, who also owns WEZR Radio, said he will become consultant and produce an occasional special once WXGZ returns to the air.

WXGZ's power is equivalent to

what it was in the past, Evans says. The station will have a broad viewing area.

The station's future on cable is to be determined.

"What we're looking for is a committed channel lineup where they have contracts — not just ideas — but contracts in place so we know what the real programming will be," said Kathy Keating, president of CableVision.

It's premature to make definite plans about WXGZ, she said.

"If they have a good program lineup, we will be talking with them about retransmission consent," Keating said.

Crown Cable has a contingency plan for WXGZ to fit into its lineup. It would be placed in the "basic tier" of Channels 2 to 13, said Julie Seiler-Stadtmueller, marketing manager.

"Nothing will be deleted," she said. "We'll just move some channels around."